

Spring 2013

Book Review: Archives for the Lay Person: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections

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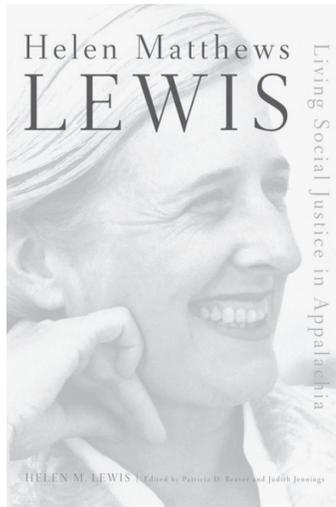
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Recommended Citation

Olsen, Martin F. (2013) "Book Review: Archives for the Lay Person: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 61 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.

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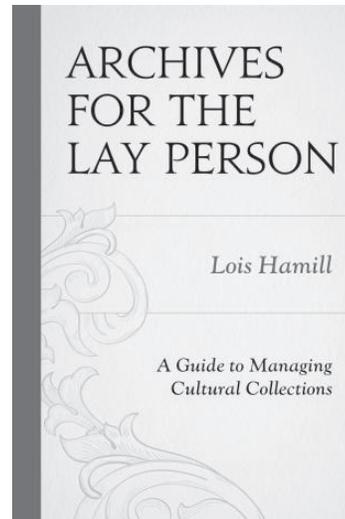


Beaver, Patricia D. and Judith Jennings (eds.). *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012. 263 p. ISBN 978-0-8131-3437-6. \$40.

This beautifully presented story of the life and career of Helen Matthews Lewis is a jewel for anyone's library who is fascinated by the history of Appalachian culture and the social movements in the years between the 1960s and the present day. A revealing portrait of a woman seemed called to identify, examine and find ways to make life better for those she met and chose to help. Time spent reading the biographical review of Helen's childhood, intervening years and final years of this scholar and social humanitarian will reward the reader. One can see Helen as a little girl absorbing the social discriminations around her and reflecting upon those as driving forces in her choice of research as a social counselor and activist. To learn about her linking of human and cultural observations to her plans to make life better for others is truly inspiring. Her social justice career spanned issues that are relevant today around the world. Concern for the plight for the less fortunate, concern for the environment, concern for health and wellness, concern for sustainability of all good things may remind us of humanitarians serving today in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and those areas near and far in our hemisphere—those whom we know are the struggling victims of quiet desperation anywhere in the world.

Helen's 12 Step Plan to improve and sustain communities that present cultural ills similar to the towns and villages of Appalachia is a visionary creation of someone who lived and worked to bring wellness, productivity and hope. It might be said that one must live poverty and its ravages to be able to know what must be done to truly help. Also steps and time as reflected in Helen's revelations unveil truths only learned by patience, hope and reflection. Anyone with a passion for finding ways to live one's own life in service to others will truly enjoy "Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia".

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Hamill, Lois. *Archives for the Lay Person: A Guide to Managing Cultural Collections*. New York: Altamira Press, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013. 296 p. ISBN 978-0-7591-1972-7. \$70.

In this concise but extremely thorough book, Lois Hamill, University Archivist at Northern Kentucky University bridges the gap for individuals and smaller institutions that need to organize what may often be long neglected collections. In this era of resource constraint, Lois takes a methodical approach to the description of these items, relying heavily on the affordable Past Perfect Software which can generate museum quality records for the beginner, with the informed narrative from Ms. Hamill to lead the way.

Replete with templates and appendices of needed documentation, Ms. Hamill builds on her initial definitions of archival terms with specific application of method to the process of building a collection, frequently referring to fundamental concepts to reinforce each phase of the process. This approach supplies both the how and the why for the uninitiated, making the development of the collection follow a logical and scholarly path. The book is full of specific recommendations and processing details for the fledgling archivist, such as the purchase of acid free folders and use of the number two pencil for marking items; small things perhaps, but nonetheless important, as anyone who has tried to digitize a photo with markings reverse embossed on its face from someone marking the item with a ball point pen will attest to.

The most challenging issue for any archivist or institution must be the often murky area of ownership, which Ms. Hamill deals with in her explanation of the PANE principal, an acronym for Purpose, Amount, Nature and Effect to evaluate the property rights attached to an item. For example, if someone hires a photographer to take wedding photos, where do the intellectual property rights lie? Since the photographer is the creator of the photo, he or she retains the rights to their publication, just as the original subject must go back to the photographer to obtain copies.

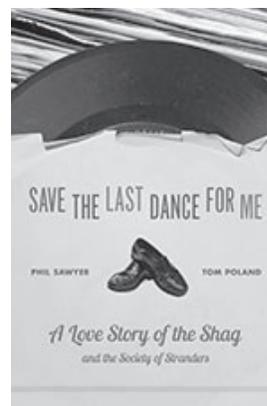
Ms. Hamill sets up several concrete examples to illustrate how these determinations are made, and more importantly, the necessary documentation for institutions to protect themselves as items go on display, or are reproduced.

Physical exhibitions of items with reference to display, lighting and security and the conditions of archival storage are each dealt with in turn. Also the conditions of loaning items and publicity for an upcoming exhibition are illustrated. This particular chapter resonated with this reader, as I recently viewed “The America I Am” exhibit touring Charlotte, and attended a talk given by the curator, John Fleming, who gave a post event appreciation for the protracted negotiations and preparation needed to make this event possible. Ms. Hamill focuses on the preparation for such displays in her signature methodical style.

The final chapters deal with the odd elements in any collection, those that often do not easily fit in the easily cataloged world of manuscripts and photographs. Movie film, for example, how should it be preserved? Textiles? Plaques and architectural objects? Items with three dimensions? And what of vinyl records? All of these items have their own specific preservation requirements that are detailed in this work and finally the most important items for last: who will do the work and what happens when disaster strikes? The use of volunteer labor is essential for smaller institutions attempting to collect, describe and preserve their cultural heritage but this can often be problematic, as the lack of expertise and the diminished commitment over time for those in unpaid positions becomes evident. This can often be seen in the faces of student volunteers when handing them a stack of photos to be digitized. Sadly, it is often true that prime real estate in any institution is not reserved for the archives. Basement storage with its lack of environmental controls and a myriad of drain pipes hanging overhead like a blade attached to a descending pendulum threaten the very items we wish to preserve.

So, I must give praise to Ms. Hamill for pulling together so much useful information in a single volume. Yes, in this age of electronic information so readily at one’s demand, it can be incredibly time consuming to visit first one site and then another, following the trail from the Getty to the VRA Core elements website looking for exactly the right information to make a credible, scholarly collection. If there was one ready reference work I would recommend to someone commencing an archival collection it would be the *Archives for the Lay Person*. Ms. Hamill has given us a roadmap, folded neatly. We need only drive.

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Sawyer, Phil and Tom Poland. *Save the Last Dance for Me: A Love Story of the Shag and the Society of Stranders*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012. 192 p. ISBN 978-1-61117-087-0. \$39.95 (Hardcover). ISBN 978-1-61117-088-7. \$21.95 (paper).

To date, very few works have been published about the shag, the official state dance of both North and South Carolina. *Save the Last Dance* by Phil Sawyer and Tom Poland is the first to be published by a university press, and focuses on the history and cultural impact of the dance itself as well as the Society of Stranders, a group dedicated to the dance’s continuing legacy.

Author Dr. Phil Sawyer, a retired university professor, is president emeritus of the Society of Stranders and a recipient of the group’s Lifetime Achievement award in 2011. Author Tom Poland has written numerous books and articles on topics relating to South Carolina and Southern history.

The book tells the story of the shag dance from its beginnings, including both the documented history and the legends. Along the way it paints a lively and vivid picture of the lives of shag dance and beach music enthusiasts on the North and South Carolina coast during the 1940s, 1950s and beyond. Woven throughout each chapter are personal anecdotes from the people who were there, which illuminate the historical and cultural analysis and become part of the “love story” of the dance alluded to in the book’s well-chosen subtitle. *Save the Last Dance* also includes photographs of important places, people, and events relating to the history of the dance and the establishment of the Society of Stranders.

Other recent publications related to the shag focus on giving a pictorial history of the dance (*Shagging in the Carolinas*, Arcadia Press, 2005) and on profiling popular shag music and recording artists (*Carolina Beach Music*, History Press, 2011). Libraries which already own these two titles will want to purchase *Save the Last Dance* to add its historical and cultural overview to complement their collection. All libraries where there is strong interest in dance, music history and Southern culture should also consider adding this book.

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